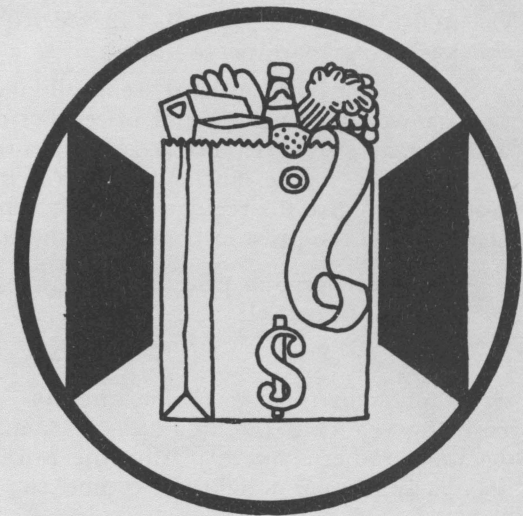


FOOD PACKAGING AND LABELING CAN HELP YOU SHOP

Gwendolyne Clyatt*



In self-service stores, the package and its label are the "salesman" — the link between the manufacturer and you, the family shopper. With the increase in packaged food, you are more dependent upon pictures and printed label information for clues to package contents.

A successful package catches the shopper's eye, identifies the product and gives information about the food. If a picture is used, it must truly represent the product in the package. As new products and different forms of old products are developed, the package, form, color and general appearance can be big factors in their being accepted or rejected.

Label requirements

The name, address and zip code of the manufacturer, packer or distributor are required on all labels.

Products must be identified by their common or usual names. If offered in more than one form (sliced, whole, etc.), the particular form must be stated, illustrated or visible through the package.

The federal law requires double labeling of contents. Packages of at least 1 pound and less than 4 pounds must give contents in terms of total ounces. A statement of pounds and ounces must follow.

*Extension consumer marketing information specialist, Texas A&M University.

Packages containing at least 1 pint and less than 1 gallon also must have the contents stated two ways.

Examples: Net contents — 56 fluid ounces
(1 qt. 1½ pt.)

or

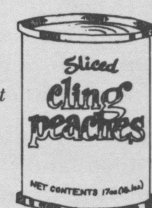
Net contents — 56 fluid ounces
(1 qt. 1 pt. 8 oz)

The total number of ounces is listed first, making it easier to compare prices per ounce of various sizes. For example, comparison of the cost per ounce of dry powdered milk in 9, 20 and 47-ounce packages is possible. Net quantity of a package is stated on the display side of the label, parallel to the base.



name
and form
of product

net
contents



If the manufacturer states the number of servings in the package (optional), he also must give the size of each serving in common measures.

Examples: 2 servings.....3 oz. each
or

2 servings.....½ cup each
or

2 servings.....4 tablespoons each

Use of descriptive words which tend to exaggerate the amount of food in a package such as "jumbo pound" or "giant quart" is not allowed.

Half empty containers (slack-filled) are banned unless extra air space or packaging materials are essential to protect the product or are required by the packaging machinery.

Packages or labels marked "cents-off" must show savings over the regular retail price. For example, a label may say, "Price marked is 10 cents off the regular price." The label may also (in the usual pricing spot) give the regular price, the represented cents-off and the price to be paid by the consumer.

Example: Regular price.....	\$.97
cents-off10
Price	\$.87

Manufacturers may compensate for increased costs by reducing the quantity of familiar-sized packages rather than increasing the price. Check the package's net weight each time you buy.

The common pint bottle sometimes is replaced by one holding 13, 14 or 15 ounces. What looks like a quart bottle may only contain 27, 28 or 30 ounces. If the total price remains the same, the cost per ounce increases.

Can sizes have grown smaller. The No. 2 size (20 ounces) lost out in popularity to the No. 303 can (16 ounces). Use of the No. 300 size, which contains 14½ ounces, is increasing.

Boxes are the easiest packaging form to manipulate. A reduction in the size of a box can be masked by changing dimensions, color or design.

Proposed labeling

More than 55 percent of our food is canned, frozen, combined or processed. Diets before World War II consisted mostly of fresh food. Additional label information which could provide a broader basis for future choices includes nutrition labeling, open dating and unit pricing.

Nutrition labeling now appears on some packaged food, and its use will increase as new products are marketed and packages redesigned. Nutrition labeling gives the following information.

1. The number of calories the food supplies (specified in ounces, cups or other common measure)

2. The number grams of carbohydrate, proteins and fats the food contains
3. What the food contributes to daily requirements of vitamins, iron and calcium

Unit pricing gives the price per unit measure (ounce, pound, pint, quart, etc.) of a product as well as the price of the total package. This information allows shoppers to choose the most economical size and to compare similar foods. In stores where unit pricing is being tested, shelf tags are the most common method of posting unit prices.

Another area of concern is the dating of packaged perishable food so that consumers can avoid buying out-of-date foods. Although most food products now on grocery store shelves are coded, the information is primarily for inventory and quality control.

Open dating advocates say that consumers are entitled to information on product freshness. The information could be helpful to the homemaker as she shops, stores and uses perishable products. Those in favor of open dating point out that coded packages (which the shopper sees and knows may include a date indicative of freshness) make the consumer feel somewhat deceived. Open dating could also aid the retailer in stock rotation and removal of out-of-date food.

Packaging costs

Packaging for \$20 of groceries costs \$1.50 to \$2. Although food packaging costs are increasing, the total cost of some items may decrease as modern processing and packaging reduce handling, transportation and labor costs.

For example, most fresh carrots are now marketed without tops. Having the tops removed at the point of production results in lower transportation costs and tastier carrots.

Consumer approval

You, the consumer, have a great deal to say about the products a grocer offers. You cast your vote in favor of an item by buying it. If a food item does not fulfill your needs, do not buy it. A store cannot afford to offer food items that do not gain consumer approval; competition for shelf space is too great. Remember, label information does little good unless you use it.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic levels, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.